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583 hut, and cooks and eats it there with her relatives and children.
252 Delicacies such as meat, fish, or beer are divided between the houses. If the husband later removes his wife to his own village, the exchange of gifts and the visits of grandchildren still persist.

583 Thus in the old days the Bemba husband acquired sexual rights over his wife for five or six years before he could consider himself the economic head of his household, and even nowadays the period is normally two or three years. The power to allocate food and beer to his friends, the ambition of the young husband, is a privilege only gradually won.[1] Control over his children and the right to remove them and their mother to his own community, should he desire to do so, is achieved last of all. The bridegroom has in fact to change his position from being almost a stranger in his wife's village to one of considerable standing and even authority, when he comes to have married daughters and hence sons-in-law of his own. I have seen a young bridegroom stand sheepishly in the distance watching his wife laughing and talking with five of her female relatives on the veranda of her mother's hut. He was afraid to ask her to bring him water, scared by the sight of so many members of his wife's family all sitting together, and unable to join the group because of the in-law avoidance rules. Yet he would have been demeaned in Bemba eyes if he had gone to draw the water himself. Onlookers were much amused. 'Look he is afraid to call his wife,' they said, smiling, but made no offer to help. The position of a young son-in-law is in fact considered exceedingly funny, and Bemba delight to point out his embarrassing situation. Later in life, as the father of three or four married daughters with children, he has a very different status, and, if he choose to remain in his wife's village, he is accepted and honoured as one of the *bakalamba* of the community.

583 The husband's dependence on his wife's family is brought to an
●606 end by definite stages. These are ceremonially marked and the assumption of behaviour proper to each is traditionally defined. The relationships between a man and his affinal relations are not left to the hazards of an informal process of adjustment and individual reaction as in our own society. On his betrothal the son-in-law receives a series of ritual presentations of different foodstuffs from his mother-in-law (*ukushikula*) which make him

[1] Cf. Chapters XI and XII for discussion on distribution and conceptions of wealth.

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free to eat the foods she has cooked for him.[1] After a period varying anything from five to fifteen years he is ceremoniously admitted to his wife's family (*ukumuingishya*) 'to make him enter in', and after this feast and dance the keeping of the in-law taboos is at an end. This rite takes place when the marriage appears absolutely stable and two or more children have been born, and the ceremony is no mere picturesque survival at the present day. The early years of Bemba marriage are a genuine period of trial, and fathers-in-law do not hesitate to refuse to admit their daughter's husbands into their family if the latter have not won their full approval. I heard of a case in which a man performed the *ukuingishya* ceremony for his youngest son-in-law after a period of two years, because he was a steady, likeable fellow, but postponed the rite for ten in the case of his eldest daughter's husband who was less dependable. It is only when husbands are scarce, under modern conditions of absentee labour, that fathers are afraid to exert their jurisdiction over their sons-in-law in the traditional way.

The Symbolism of Cooked Food.

The feeding of the *shifyala* is not only one of the economic obligations of the marriage contract, but part of the complicated pattern of etiquette prescribed between the bridegroom and his wife's family. It is, in fact, one of those instances in which the giving and receiving of cooked food has become symbolic of the legal or economic relationship which entails it. It is particularly important to notice that the preparation of porridge and relish is the woman's most usual way of expressing the correct kinship sentiment towards her different male relatives, for this actually affects the distribution of food in the community. The case of the son-in-law is characteristic.

The Bemba custom of sending food to the son-in-law, *ukutebeta shifyala*, with all the ceremonial that surrounds it, is one of the essential elements of the prescribed etiquette between the wife's family and that of the husband. The young son-in-law may be an outsider and a nobody in some respects, but he must be treated

[1] The full series of ceremonies are rarely performed nowadays, but the son-in-law will probably be made ritually free of one or two of the chief foods. Compare the observance of the *Hlonipa* customs of avoidance by the Zulu bride, coming to live in her husband's village according to the principles of patrilocal marriage, and the ceremonial by which she is gradually made free to drink the milk in the kraal of her relatives by marriage.

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with the right courtesies. He must have that due so precious to the Bemba, and so constantly the subject of discussion—*mucinshi* —which might be translated respect, courtesy, or recognition of one's rightful status.

The first dish of porridge sent to the young bridegroom is considered an interesting and exciting event even in present circumstances, when much of the ritual surrounding it has been dropped. A little girl of 12, betrothed for the first time, explained to me with shining eyes what would happen when her 16-year-old bridegroom came to take up his residence in her village that night. 'We shall make him porridge,' she said in delighted tones, 'we shall send it to him where he sits in the men's shelter. He has become our child, i.e. a member of our family, or a dependent of ours' (*Asanguka mwana uesu*). Women like to speak of the food they cook for their daughter's husbands. To provide big dishes of porridge and occasional gourds of beer for her *shifyala* is a wealthy woman's pride, and she will take great care to serve and cover the food baskets in the correct way (*ukupikula*). In fact, the Bemba, who delight in the ceremonious carrying-out of obligations, like to make a parade of this custom of feeding the son-in-law, particularly to a stranger. A native sitting in my tent would often turn and look through the open door and point out with a pleased expression the small boys with baskets of porridge on their heads who were walking off to the men's shelter, and exclaim with satisfaction at the sight. A typical comment would be, 'Look! They are carrying food to the sons-in-law! It is *mucinshi!* That is our custom; and in the old days it was just the same.' It is not uncommon for women to deny themselves food rather than let their daughter's husband go short. In the hunger months I saw a more or less starving old woman near Kasama prepare her last dish of food for her son-in-law, who was himself a well-paid young teacher at the Government school. She went without herself. 'It is what is due to the son-in-law' (*ukucindika shifyala*), she said shortly when I expressed surprise.

The young husbands themselves are, of course, equally insistent that they should be treated with the right etiquette. If the wife's family is short of food, or of labour to cook it, on any occasion, there is no cause for complaint. But if it is once suspected that the mother-in-law is merely being stingy, then the insult is felt to be grave. It is a sufficient cause for the break-up of the marriage.

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I met two attractive sisters left unmarried long after the usual time and asked the reason. I was told, 'Their husbands come and live here a short time, and then they go. They say, "The mother is mean. She stints us of porridge. She gives us no respect." ' In the same way I have heard young men discussing the pros and cons of cross-cousin marriage and concluding, 'Cross-cousin marriage is not so good. Our aunts (*banyina senge*) do not give us as much respect as other women would. They do not send us food every day or cover the dishes elegantly.'

The importance of the offering of food to the son-in-law continues long after the wife has become an independent householder, cooking on her own. His mother-in-law continues to send him dishes. In fact, the offering of food by the woman to the man is one of the essential obligations of kinship and other social ties. It is part of the legal duty of a wife to cook porridge for her husband and to allow him a predominant share of it, and hence it becomes a privilege and a matter of pride. I noticed that young girls, recently betrothed, would intimate this fact by saying shyly: 'I have begun to cook for him.' Older married women will beg, borrow, or work for food to supply their husbands if their own granary is empty. Each wife in a polygamous household will cook for her husband even if she has insufficient for herself, so that a husband may get two or three dishes of porridge while a wife and her children may go short. I saw a second wife, whose garden had been destroyed by locusts, live with her three children for two days entirely on mushrooms, while the last remnants of her millet were ground up daily to provide a diminutive dish of porridge for her husband, the latter amply supplied by his more fortunate head-wife, who had so much surplus millet that she sat at the other end of the village brewing beer with it. To my question as to why the second wife did not keep her grain for herself and her children and leave the first to supply the husband, the reply was immediate: 'Because she hates her fellow wife.' The rivalry natural between co-wives was expressed in the competition over the provision of food. The Bemba woman's prestige largely rests on her power to provide porridge and relish for her male relatives and to serve it nicely. These are the dues a man expects from his mother-in-law, his wife, and a number of other women in his kinship group.

It is the *umucinshi*[1] that matters to both parties, as well as the filling of the belly. Hence the women in a village do not attempt

[1] [i.e., custom. – Analyst]

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264 to organize the supply of eating-baskets sent to the young men's shelter. There may be two one day and twelve another.[1] It does not matter. Every mother-in-law sends just whenever she has time and supplies, so that the men of the village have a varying amount to eat from day to day. The regularity of the diet is thus directly affected by the symbolic use of offerings of cooked food.

The Cooking Team.

252 476 602 We have turned for a moment from our main subject, the joint preparation of food, but it will be seen that the system of interdependent matrilocal households provides two units of economic co-operation, the women's and the men's. The former look for relish, fetch firewood, pound, grind, and cook together, and usually do their gardening work in twos and threes. The latter clear the bush for gardens jointly and, more rarely, hoe in common. But it is important to remember that the ties of kinship between the women's group are stronger than those between men. The women who work together are usually the old grandmother, her married daughter, her unmarried girls and adolescent granddaughters, besides other female relatives temporarily with her. The team may not be as large, of course. Every household in the village does not belong to a 'big house'. There may be only two or three individual families linked together, especially in a new village. But the basis of co-operation is the same in each case—mother and daughter, grandmother and granddaughter, sister and sister,[2] &c., and it is the matrilocal family pattern which will be ultimately reproduced as a normal process of development. So much is this the case [595] that the wives of a polygamist never cook together, but each works with her own mother, sister, or any other female relatives who may happen to be in the village.[3] It is the solidarity and common activities of groups of the mother-daughter type which form the basis of the Bemba village. A man's own female relatives, his mother and sister, may be dependent on him, but they do not form part of the cooking unit. In-law taboos prevent a woman [606 607] from co-operating closely with her mother-in-law, and her relations with her sister-in-law are usually constrained, if not hostile.

[1] Cf. p. 183. [2] Using these terms in the classificatory sense.

[3] The wives of a chief are often an exception in this respect. They seem to have accepted the status of polygamy more completely than the wives of commoners, and the heavy work involved in cooking for tribute labour makes it almost necessary for them to co-operate.

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593 With this system of matrilineal descent the ties between a
604 woman and her brother are very close. The woman produces children who are the heirs of her brothers. The man is the natural guardian of his sisters' children, and he must be consulted about his uterine niece's marriage and could claim the right to marry her where he pleased. He could protect her after her marriage if he wished to do so. The mother's brother could generally claim possession of his sister's children if her marriage broke down. In
[567] the old days he could give one of the children as a slave or a blood-wite to the head of a family to whom he or one of the lineage group owed reparation. He could command the services of his sister's son and bid him follow him to war. The woman in her turn could com-
[789] mand the services of her brother's daughter and was thought to be able to bless or curse the fertility of the latter's marriage. Brother and sister can take each other's property and behave in a free and easy way with each other.

591 Marriage is uxorilocal among the Bemba and among kindred
171 tribes such as the Bisa, Lala, Lamba, Cewa, and Kaonde which
596 also perform a kind of chisungu ceremony. A young man who marries goes to live in his wife's village where he builds himself a hut and becomes a member of her extended family. This is a domestic and economic unit. The sons-in-law work together under
● [606] the father-in-law and the daughters with their mother. The man gives service to his father-in-law rather than cattle or other goods as in most other Bantu societies. A young couple has no cooking fire of its own to begin with. The girl cooks with her mother and sends food to her husband at the man's shelter, where he sits with his friends. At first the couple have no granary of their own and no gardens and when they acquire the latter, later in their married life, the gardens are cleared near those of the rest of the extended family group.

596 As a family group of this kind grows in size, its head often
621 chooses to separate from the old village and to start a new one of his own. Hence the desire of a Bemba to have many daughters in order to be able 'to found a house'.

591 After the marriage has been established, and children have been born to the union, it remains a question for individual decision whether the husband is given permission to remove his

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585 burning log out of his hut to the crowd of waiting relatives outside. This is proof of his virility: the women shrill their plaudits and the men shout. The bride is given her marriage pot at dawn by her father's sister, and then follows the presentation of the bride and bridegroom to the community. Later comes the setting up of the fire-place for the girl and still later, perhaps after a year or two, the giving to the son-in-law of his granary and his garden.

421 The form of social structure I have described exists in a culture in which there is no permanent form of property, such as land or cattle, which could bind the members of a kinship group together or link one generation with the next. Consequently, social relations in Bemba society consist very largely of the giving and receiving of services.

556 622 606 604 Wealth consists of the power to command service such as a chief calls for from his subjects, a headman from his villagers, a father-in-law from his son-in-law, or a mother's brother from his maternal nephews. Service could also be demanded in the old days from surrounding tribes which were raided for slaves.

556 Service makes it possible for a man to put big fields under cultivation, to build a big granary and hence to be able to feed more workers in another year.

622 Service was given to the chief in return for food provided at the capital and also the supernatural powers on which the people believed they depended. Service was given to the headmen from some of these motives also, but the headman was also usually a relative and he received these dues in his capacity as head of a kinship group. Those not so closely related he had to attract by a nice mixture of authority and the formal expression of courtesy.

576 622 In such a society the ceremonial expression of respect by kneeling to a superior, clapping hands before him, offering him food in a specially formal fashion, or even rolling on the back is characteristic. Men should creep into the presence of their chief, throw themselves over on their backs and roll from side to side clapping their hands; the abject humility of the gesture is striking to the European observer. In such circumstances it will be readily understood that the father-in-law attracts his son-in-law not only by the economic support he provides but by much formal giving of food

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for which the women in the household are almost entirely respon- 606
sible. The son-in-law in his turn behaves respectfully towards the elder members of his wife's family. The tensions which I have described as inherent in a matrilocal marriage system of this kind make these presentations very significant in maintaining a family and village structure which, as I have explained, is one of rather precarious balance.

Accepted sex roles. Social structure, as I have used the term here, 554
consists of a series of social roles which are associated with membership of the different social groups of which the tribe is composed, or with different status positions in it or with formalized relationships, such as that of subject to chief. In the present connection the roles which are of special interest are those based on sex and age and the social behaviour expected of husband and wife.

The ideal of a Bemba in the old days was military success and with it the exaction of tribute and slaves from conquered peoples. This is arrogantly expressed in the phrase 'We Bemba cultivate with the spear and not the hoe'. Patient industry in agriculture was not as much admired as the power to command service from others. The ability to attract followers by generosity, the elegant exchange of courtesies, and by personal popularity was highly rated. The organizing powers and judgement which are essential to the achievement of either of these aims are admired in themselves.

Thrift and the slow accumulation of property are not admired 556
since they cannot be achieved in terms of Bemba economy. Children are brought up to share everything they have with the group they are with and easy and even reckless giving is praised. Bemba also admire display of all kinds, but here, as may be imagined, the display is not so much of personal possession but of followers and adherents, who walk about with a man of note and praise him.

Bemba admire ceremonious behaviour in personal relations, 576
exact forms of address, the recognition of social precedence and rights to respect, and the avoidance of quarrels, unpleasantness and 'scenes' which might disturb the delicate balance of village relations. They praise suavity and self-control in personal relations. They delight in circumlocutions and allusive speech, and seem [195]
sophisticated in social contacts, as compared with their neighbours, the Bisa.

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The Ceremony

Then the girls were pulled to the front and told to invite the company to eat. They sang:

> '*The food from our gardens is finished.*
> *Help yourselves, mothers*' (No. 18)

('We older women say, "Now we have danced the child as a gardener. She must start to cultivate herself now".' (*Fwe abakalamba twacindila umwana wa umulimi. Nomba ali no kulimishva.*))

There followed an endless business of handling the seeds which were offered to everyone present in order of seniority and then handed back. It was a relief when the father of one of the girls danced into the hut and did a capering solo in honour of the *nacimbusa*, throwing a cheap bracelet into one of the baskets. He was criticized as being mean in his gift, but the dance was done with great dash and gaiety.

The ritual lighting of the girls' fire (*namushimwa*)

An important stage in the ceremony had now been reached—the lighting of the new fire. This might be described as the first of the rites of aggregation. The senior 'father's sister' of one of the girls, wrinkled and bent with rheumatism, danced to the company and then lay down on her back. Nangoshye picked up a fire stick and started twirling it round in the groove on the old woman's thigh, telling the two girls to copy her afterwards. Then the two old women set out to make fire in earnest. Women do not commonly make fire among the Bemba. The work needs skill and practice as well as considerable strength. The two old women rubbed the fire stick in turns, sweating and groaning with the effort. The company swayed to and fro moaning the chisungu fire songs:

> '*We have come to beg fire,*
> *Lion we beg it of you.*' (No. 19)

and

> '*Scratch, Scratch* (*The grating of the fire-sticks*),
> *How many children have you borne?*' (No. 20)

After half an hour of growing anxiety, I offered a box of matches which are commonly reckoned as 'new fire' in Bemba ceremonial.

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The Ceremony

881 606 372a This was received with shocked protest, 'No, this isn't just ordinary fire. Alas, Mother! We can't use matches.' It seemed an impasse.

At last, to the intense relief of everyone, the wood shaving set to catch the sparks began to smoke and a little flame flickered up. Clapping broke out and cries of 'ulla! ulla!' saluted the new fire. It was a curiously moving moment because of the tenseness of the women packed tight on the floor of the hut through the long wait.

The rite is described shortly as 'to beg for parenthood' (*ukulomba ubufyashi*). The father's sister plays the leading part in [842] the ceremony and it is she who by tradition influences the fertility of the girl. 'The sticks must be rubbed on the back of the father's sister so that the girl will bear a child quickly.'

881 825 372 (As we have seen the lion is equated throughout this ceremony with the bridegroom, the chief, or the male principle. Two women when questioned about the song (No. 19) just said, 'The lion is a chief.' Fire is also equated with generation. The girl owes parenthood to the older women who have made fire for her, 'We say to the girl "We women have made your fire for you. We are in pain now. Our hands ache from the rubbing. You must take over now".')[1]

881 372 Twigs and sticks were deftly built round the young flame and a considerable fire began to crackle. Nangoshye crawled towards it on all fours with a water pot on her head. The two girls crawled behind her clasping their arms round her waist. All three lowered the water pot on to the fire with hands and teeth. I have no recorded comments on this part of the rite. I think it almost certainly symbolizes the heating of the marriage pot of the girl which is stood on the fire by an old woman with the bridegroom and bride clasping her waist. It may also signify the handing over of the fire from the old to the young as suggested in the comment above.

881 The seeds in the winnowing basket were now divided out so that each woman had a handful to cook. The remains were thrown into the big pot over the fire, the pot of the *namushimwa*. We all retired exhausted to our own quarters to eat for the first time since morning.

[834] [1] A.C. adds: 'You cannot beg fire from a woman in a different sexual condition. The girl must have a new fire after her chisungu. She must not have intercourse during menstruation.'

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older in order of seniority; from the initiated women to the girls. It was a display of ceremonial obligation, of precedence, of *mucinci*, to use the common Bemba term. The younger helpers danced with the porridge bowls on their heads while the *banacisungu* were pushed in backwards, again on all fours, to the singing of the entering-in song (No. 15). The porridge bowls were ceremonially uncovered and covered again with ululation. The girls' paternal relatives seized the dishes and offered them to all present in order of seniority. The bowls were then put on the girls' own heads and they were made to dance round with them to show their respect to the *banacimbusa* present.

Singing games followed. The two senior paternal relatives of the girls pretended to chase each other off a small stool with Nangoshye scolding them and the company singing, 'Don't sit on the stool.' (No. 26) This was said to represent the Bemba custom of chasing the Shimwalule, the official burier of the Citimukulu from office after he had performed the mortuary ritual required of him.[1]

The same two old women next pretended to hunt and spear fish under the porridge bowl. This was explained as, 'The girl tries to hide food from her mother-in-law and asks her friends to keep the matter dark.'

Nangoshye picked up a porridge bowl pretending it was too heavy to carry. The women sang about a bat (No. 25) who represents the woman who goes out to hunt for lovers in the dark. They also sang another song about the hawk who pounces down on food without ceremony—which no girl should do. (No. 26)[2]

The girls were then made to touch each bowl all over and each lid was again picked off in a woman's mouth and offered to each elder in order of precedence. The oldest paternal aunt, Nacitembo (see page 62) then gave each girl a small lump of porridge and took it back; she then hid some of the porridge on the roof.

The hidden *mbusa* were now to be shown to the company. Nacitembo, as the oldest woman present and the representative of the father's side of one girls' families, danced holding the small

[1] *Subsequent Bemba interpretation* (A.C.). A woman must not sit on a stool in the presence of her elders.

[2] A.C. interprets No. 25: 'Evening is the time for play but wait until the housework is over before chatting with friends.'

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months before puberty and forms of partial intercourse are practised before she is fully grown. Yet, in spite of this, intercourse is thought to be dangerous. Moreover, it is the act within the marriage bond that is feared, not the act outside it.

The taboos surrounding marriage may be accounted for superficially in terms of Bemba belief, as I have already tried to show. Since it is through marriage that a man is able to get into touch with his ancestral spirits, the relationship is, for that reason, considered dangerous; dangerous because it is a source of power. Taboos of the Bemba type may exist in other tribes where access to ancestral spirits can only be made after an act of intercourse in legal wedlock followed by purification. Data on this point are not available from other areas at present.

It is difficult to believe that the Bemba associate guilt with sex in marriage, even though they speak of married couples as being hot, or with 'bad things on their bodies', if they have not been purified in the approved way. It is at least possible that sex is only considered shameful in association with a man's ancestors who are, in this society, his maternal uncles and grandfather. In daily life a Bemba behaves with reticence and shyness before his mother's brother since he may one day inherit the latter's wife together with his name, his status and his bow.[1] There may thus be an extension to the spirit world of attitudes to living relatives, which would explain the resolute attempt to keep a 'hot' person away from the spirit shrines.

The taboos may also reflect the anxieties associated with marriage in Bemba society, for it is, after all, a frail link on which to depend for an approach to supernatural power. Margaret Read has pointed out that among the Nyasaland Ngoni, who are patrilineal with strong patrilineages, and who practise marriage by bride-wealth, girls are protected before marriage and the ceremony involves a test of virginity. After marriage there are few, if any, taboos on handling fire. Among the neighbouring Cewa who are,

[1] It is possible that the castration complex takes a different form in matrilineal societies in which a young man succeeds to the role of his maternal uncle and not his father. The reluctance to associate sex with an approach to the ancestors may be connected with it. Malinowski made suggestions along these lines in 1927 in *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* but little serious comparative work has been done on these lines since then, so far as I know.